

Did Jane Austen Hint of Sanditon's Future?

LORRAINE HANAWAY

Wayne, Pennsylvania

Jane Austen tells us about an overturned carriage in the first paragraph of her *Sanditon* manuscript. It is a prophetic accident. "A Gentleman & Lady" (Mr. and Mrs. Parker) are traveling in unfamiliar country when they are "induced by Business to quit the high road, & attempt a very rough Lane"; their carriage is overturned as it toils up the long ascent. I suggest that Jane Austen uses this incident to foreshadow the fate of Sanditon. She seems to be telling us that when Mr. Parker ventures into unfamiliar situations he is likely to get into trouble.

The carriage accident is a clue. Mr. Parker tried the unknown rocky road to reach the hypothesized surgeon's house and crashed along the way. He is venturing onto equally unknown and treacherous ground in his speculations to transform Sanditon into a popular seaside resort. He doesn't quite know where he is going but is likely headed for an upset.

The carriage crashes because the unfamiliar road is both uphill and too rough for the coach to negotiate. I submit that Jane Austen is hinting that Sanditon's road to success is equally unfamiliar, uphill and rough, too rough for Mr. Parker to negotiate, and that Sanditon, too, is doomed to crash before it ever materializes as the fashionable watering hole of Mr. Parker's dreams.